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SOME EXPERIENCES OF AN IRISH R.M.

BY E. Œ. SOMERVILLE AND MARTIN ROSS

No. VII. A MISDEAL

THE wagonette slewed and slackened mysteriously on the top of the long hill above Drumcurran. So many remarkable things had happened since we had entrusted ourselves to the guidance of Mr. Bernard Shute that I rose in my place and possessed myself of the brake, and in so doing saw the horses with their heads hard in against their chests and their quarters jammed crookedly against the splashboard, being apparently tied into knots by some inexplicable power.

'Someone's pulling the reins out of my hand!' exclaimed Mr. Shute.

The horses and pole were by this time making an acute angle with the wagonette, and the groom plunged from the box to their heads. Miss Sally Knox, who was sitting beside me, looked over the edge.

'Put on the brake! the reins are twisted round the axle!' she cried, and fell into a fit of laughter.

We all—that is to say, Philippa, Miss Shute, Miss Knox, and I—got out as speedily as might be; but, I think, without panic;

Mr. Shute alone stuck to the ship, with the horses struggling and rearing below him. The groom and I contrived to back them, and by so doing caused the reins to unwind themselves from the axle.

'It was my fault,' said Mr. Shute, hauling them in as fast as we could give them to him, 'I broke the reins yesterday, and these are the phaeton ones, and about six fathoms long at that, and I forgot and let the slack go overboard. It's all right, I won't do it again.'

With this reassurance we confided ourselves once more to the wagonette.

A DEN KNOWN AS THE CALF HOUSE

As we neared the town of Drumcurran the fact that we were on our way to a horse fair became alarmingly apparent. It is impossible to imagine how we pursued an uninjured course through the companies of horsemen, the crowded carts, the squealing colts, the irresponsible led horses, and, most immutable of all obstacles, the groups of countrywomen, with the hoods of their heavy blue cloaks over their heads. They looked like nuns of some obscure order; they were deaf and blind as ramparts of sandbags; nothing less callous to human life than a Parisian cabdriver could have burst a way through them. Many times during that drive I had cause to be thankful for the sterling qualities of Mr. Shute's brake; with its aid he dragged his over-

fed bays into a crawl that finally, and not without injury to the varnish, took the wagonette to the Royal Hotel. Every available stall in the yard was by that time filled, and it was only by virtue of the fact that the kitchenmaid was nearly related to my cook that the indignant groom was permitted to stable the bays in a den known as the calf-house.

That I should have lent myself to such an expedition was wholly due to my wife. Since Philippa had taken up her residence in Ireland she had discovered a taste for horses that was not to be extinguished, even by an occasional afternoon on the Quaker, whose paces had become harder than rock in his many journeys to Petty Sessions; she had also discovered the Shutes, new comers on the outer edge of our vast visiting district, and between them this party to Drumcurran Horse Fair had been devised. Philippa proposed to buy herself a hunter. Bernard Shute wished to do the same, possibly two hunters, money being no difficulty with this fortunate young man. Miss Sally Knox was of the company, and I also had been kindly invited, as to a missionary meeting, to come, and bring my cheque-book. The only saving clause in the affair was the fact that Mr. Flurry Knox was to meet us at the scene of action.

The fair was held in a couple of large fields outside the town, and on the further bank of the Curranhilty River. Across a wide and glittering ford, horses of all sizes and sorts were splashing, and a long row of stepping stones was hopped, and staggered, and scrambled over by a ceaseless variety of foot passengers. A man with a cart plied as a ferry boat, doing a heavy trade among the applewomen, and vendors of 'crubeens,' *alias* pigs' feet, a grisly delicacy peculiar to Irish open-air holiday-making, and the July sun blazed on a scene that even Miss Cecilia Shute found to be almost repayment enough for the alarms of the drive.

'As a rule, I am so bored by driving that I find it reviving to be frightened,' she said to me, as we climbed to safety on a heathery ridge above the fields dedicated to galloping the horses; 'but when my brother scraped all those people off one side of that car, and ran the pole into the cart of lemonade-bottles, I began to wish for courage to tell him I was going to get out and walk home.'

'Well, if you only knew it,' said Bernard, who was spreading rugs over the low furze bushes in the touching belief that the prickles would not come through, 'the time you came nearest to walking home was when the lash of the whip got twisted round Nancy's tail. Miss Knox, you're an authority on these things—

don't you think it would be a good scheme to have a light anchor in the trap, and when the horses began to play the fool, you'd heave the anchor over the fence and bring them up all standing?'

'They wouldn't stand very long,' remarked Miss Sally.

'Oh, that's all right,' returned the inventor; 'I'd have a dodge to cast them loose, with the pole and the splinter-bar.'

'You'd never see them again,' responded Miss Knox demurely, 'if you thought that mattered.'

'It would be the brightest feature of the case,' said Miss Shute.

She was surveying Miss Sally through her pincenez as she spoke, and was, I have reason to believe, deciding that by the end of the day her brother would be well on in the first stages of his fifteenth love affair.

It has possibly been suspected that Mr. Bernard Shute was a sailor, had been a sailor rather, until within the last year, when he had tumbled into a fortune and a property, and out of the navy, in the shortest time on record. His enthusiasm for horses had been nourished by the hirelings of Malta, and other resorts of Her Majesty's ships, and his knowledge of them was, so far, bounded by the fact that it was more usual to come off over their heads than their tails. For the rest, he was a clean-shaved and personable youth, with a laugh which I may, without offensive intention, define as possessing a what-cheeriness special to his profession, and a habit, engendered no doubt by long sojourns at the Antipodes, of getting his clothes in large hideous consignments from a naval outfitter.

It was eleven o'clock, and the fair was in full swing. Its vortex was in the centre of the field below us, where a low bank of sods and earth had been erected as a trial jump, with a yelling crowd of men and boys at either end, acting instead of the usual wings to prevent a swerve. Strings of reluctant horses were scourged over the bank by dozens of willing hands, while exhortation, cheers, and criticism were freely showered upon each performance.

'Give the knees to the saddle, boy, and leave the heels slack.' 'That's a nice horse. He'd keep a jock on his back where another'd throw him!' 'Well jumped, begor! She fled that fairly!' as an ungainly three-year-old flounced over the bank without putting a hoof on it. Then her owner, unloosing his pride in simile after the manner of his race,

'Ah ha! when she give a lep, man, she's that free, she's like a hare for it!'

A giggling group of country girls elbowed their way past us out of the crowd of spectators, one of the number inciting her fellows to hurry on to the other field 'until they'd see the lads galloping the horses,' to which another responding that she'd 'be skinned alive for the horses,' the party sped on their way. We—*i.e.* my wife, Miss Knox, Bernard Shute, and myself—followed in their wake, a matter by no means as easy as it looked. Miss Shute had exhibited her wonted intelligence by remaining on the hill-top with the 'Spectator;' she had not reached the happy point of possessing a mind ten years older than her age, and a face ten years younger, without also developing the gift of scenting boredom from afar. We squeezed past the noses and heels of fidgetty horses, and circumnavigated their attendant groups of critics, while half-trained brutes in snaffles bolted to nowhere and back again, and whinnying foals ran to and fro in search of their mothers.

A moderate bank divided the upper from the lower fields, and as every feasible spot in it was commanded by a refusing horse, the choice of a place and moment for crossing it required judgment. I got Philippa across it in safety; Miss Knox, though as capable as any young woman in Ireland of getting over a bank, either on horseback or on her own legs, had to submit to the assistance of Mr. Shute, and the laws of dynamics decreed that a force sufficient to raise a bower anchor should hoist her seven stone odd to the top of the bank with such speed that she landed half on her knees and half in the arms of her pioneer. A group of portentously quiet men stood near, their eyes on the ground, their hands in their pockets; they were all dressed so much alike that I did not at first notice that Flurry Knox was among them; when I did, I perceived that his eyes, instead of being on the ground, were surveying Mr. Shute with that measure of disapproval that he habitually bestowed upon strange men.

'You're later than I thought you'd be,' he said. 'I have a horse half-bought for Mrs. Yeates. It's that old mare of Bobby Bennett's; she makes a little noise, but she's a good mare, and you couldn't throw her down if you tried. Bobby wants thirty pounds for her, but I think you might get her for less. She's in the hotel stables, and you can see her when you go to lunch.'

We moved on towards the rushy bank of the river, and Philippa and Sally Knox seated themselves on a low rock, looking, in their white frocks, as incongruous in that dingy preoccupied assemblage as the dreamy meadow-sweet and purple spires of loose strife that thronged the river banks. Bernard Shute had

been lost in the shifting maze of men and horses, who were, for the most part, galloping with the blind fury of charging bulls; but presently, among a party who seemed to be riding the finish of a race, we descried our friend, and a second or two later he hauled a brown mare to a standstill in front of us.

'The fellow's asking forty-five pounds for her,' he said to Miss Sally; 'she's a nailer to gallop. I don't think it's too much?'

'Her grandsire was the Mountain Hare,' said the owner of the mare, hurrying up to continue her family history, 'and he was the grandest horse in the four baronies. He was forty-two years of age when he died, and they waked him the same as ye'd wake a Christian. They had whisky and porther—and bread—and a piper in it.'

'HER GRANDSIRE WAS THE MOUNTAIN HARE'

'Thim Mountain Hare colts is no great things,' interrupted Mr. Shute's groom contemptuously. 'I seen a colt once that was one of his stock, and if there was forty men and their wives, and they after him with sticks, he wouldn't lep a sod of turf.'

'Lep is it!' ejaculated the owner in a voice shrill with outrage. 'You may lead that mare out through the counthry, and there isn't a fence in it that she wouldn't go up to it as indepindent as if she was going to her bed, and your honour's ladyship knows that dam well, Miss Knox.'

'You want too much money for her, McCarthy,' returned Miss Sally, with her little air of preternatural wisdom.

'God pardon you, Miss Knox! Sure a lady like you knows well that forty-five pounds is no money for that mare. Forty-five pounds!' He laughed. 'It'd be as good for me to make her a present to the gentleman all out as take three farthings less for her! She's too grand entirely for a poor farmer like me, and if it wasn't for the long weak family I have, I wouldn't part with her under twice the money.'

'Three fine lumps of daughters in America paying his rent for him,' commented Flurry in the background. 'That's the long weak family!'

Bernard dismounted and slapped the mare's ribs approvingly.

'I haven't had such a gallop since I was at Rio,' he said. 'What do you think of her, Miss Knox?' Then, without waiting for an answer, 'I like her. I think I may as well give him the forty-five and have done with it!'

At these ingenuous words I saw a spasm of anguish cross the countenance of McCarthy, easily interpreted as the first pang of a life-long regret that he had not asked twice the money. Flurry Knox put up an eyebrow and winked at me; Mr. Shute's groom turned away for very shame. Sally Knox laughed with the deplorable levity of nineteen.

Thus, with a brevity absolutely scandalous in the eyes of all beholders, the bargain was concluded.

Flurry strolled up to Philippa, observing an elaborate remoteness from Miss Sally and Mr. Shute.

'I believe I'm selling a horse here myself to-day,' he said; 'would you like to have a look at him, Mrs. Yeates?'

'Oh, are you selling, Knox?' struck in Bernard, to whose brain the glory of buying a horse had obviously mounted like new wine; 'I want another, and I know yours are the right sort.'

'Well, as you seem fond of galloping,' said Flurry sardonically, 'this one might suit you.'

'You don't mean the Moonlighter?' said Miss Knox, looking fixedly at him.

'Supposing I did, have you anything to say against him?' replied Flurry.

Decidedly he was in a very bad temper. Miss Sally shrugged her shoulders, and gave a little shred of a laugh, but said no more.

In a comparatively secluded corner of the field we came upon Moonlighter, sidling and fussing, with flickering ears, his tail tightly tucked in and his strong back humped in a manner that boded little good. Even to my untutored eye, he appeared to be an uncommonly good-looking animal, a well-bred grey, with shoulders that raked back as far as the eye could wish, the true Irish jumping hind-quarters, and a showy head and neck; it was obvious that nothing except Michael Hallahane's adroit chucks at his bridle kept him from displaying his jumping powers free of charge. Bernard stared at him in silence; not the pregnant and intimidating silence of the connoisseur, but the tongue-tied muteness of helpless ignorance. His eye for horses had most probably been formed on circus posters, and the advertisements of a well-known embrocation, and Moonlighter approximated in colour and conduct to these models.

'I can see he's a ripping fine horse,' he said at length; 'I think I should like to try him.'

Miss Knox changed countenance perceptibly, and gave a perturbed glance at Flurry. Flurry remained impenetrably unamiable.

'I don't pretend to be a judge of horses,' went on Mr. Shute. 'I dare say I needn't tell *you* that!' with a very engaging smile at Miss Sally; 'but I like this one awfully.'

As even Philippa said afterwards, she would not have given herself away like that over buying a reel of cotton.

'Are you quite sure that he's really the sort of horse you want?' said Miss Knox, with rather more colour in her face than usual; 'he's only four years old, and he's hardly a finished hunter.'

The object of her philanthropy looked rather puzzled. 'What! can't he jump?' he said.

'Is it jump?' exclaimed Michael Hallahane, unable any longer to contain himself; 'is it the horse that jumped five foot of a clothes line in Heffernan's yard, and not a one on his back but himself, and didn't leave so much as the thrack of his hoof on the quilt that was hanging on it!'

'That's about good enough,' said Mr. Shute, with his large friendly laugh; 'what's your price, Knox? I must have the horse that jumped the quilt! I'd like to try him, if you don't mind. There are some jolly looking banks over there.'

'My price is a hundred sovereigns,' said Flurry; 'you can try him if you like.'

'Oh, don't!' cried Sally impulsively; but Bernard's foot was already in the stirrup. 'I call it disgraceful!' I heard her say in a low voice to her kinsman—'you know he can't ride.'

The kinsman permitted himself a malign smile. 'That's his look out,' he said.

Perhaps the unexpected docility with which Moonlighter allowed himself to be manœuvred through the crowd was due to Bernard's thirteen stone; at all events, his progress through a gate into the next field was unexceptionable. Bernard, however, had no idea of encouraging this tranquillity. He had come out to gallop, and without further ceremony he drove his heels into Moonlighter's side, and took the consequences in the shape of a very fine and able buck. How he remained within even visiting distance of the saddle it is impossible to explain; perhaps his early experience in the rigging stood him in good stead in the matter of hanging on by his hands; but, however preserved, he did

remain, and went away down the field at what he himself subsequently described as 'the rate of knots.'

Flurry flung away his cigarette and ran to a point of better observation. We all ran, including Michael Hallahane and various onlookers, and were in time to see Mr. Shute charging the least advantageous spot in a hollow-faced furzy bank. Nothing but the grey horse's extreme activity got the pair safely over; he jumped it on a slant, changed feet in the heart of a furze-bush, and was lost to view. In what relative positions Bernard and his steed alighted was to us a matter of conjecture; when we caught sight of them again, Moonlighter was running away, with his rider still on his back, while the slope of the ground lent wings to his flight.

'That young gentleman will be apt to be killed,' said Michael Hallahane with composure, not to say enjoyment.

'He'll be into the long bog with him pretty soon,' said Flurry, his keen eye tracking the fugitive.

'Oh!—I thought he was off that time!' exclaimed Miss Sally, with a gasp in which consternation and amusement were blended. 'There! He *is* into the bog!'

It did not take us long to arrive at the scene of disaster, to which, as to a dog-fight, other foot-runners were already hurrying, and on our arrival we found things looking remarkably unpleasant for Mr. Shute and Moonlighter. The latter was sunk to his withers in the sheet of black slime into which he had stampeded; the former, submerged to the waist three yards further away in the bog, was trying to drag himself towards firm ground by the aid of tussocks of wiry grass.

'Hit him!' shouted Flurry. 'Hit him! he'll sink if he stops there!'

Mr. Shute turned on his adviser a face streaming with black mud, out of which his brown eyes and white teeth gleamed with undaunted cheerfulness.

'All jolly fine,' he called back; 'if I let go this grass I'll sink too!'

A shout of laughter from the male portion of the spectators sympathetically greeted this announcement, and a dozen equally futile methods of escape were suggested. Among those who had joined us was, fortunately, one of the many boys who pervaded the fair selling halters, and, by means of several of these knotted together, a line of communication was established. Moonlighter, who had fallen into the state of inane stupor in which horses in his plight so often indulge, was roused to activity

by showers of stones and imprecations but faintly chastened by the presence of ladies. Bernard, hanging on to his tail, belaboured him with a cane, and, finally, the reins proving good, the task of towing the victims ashore was achieved.

'He's mine, Knox, you know,' were Mr. Shute's first words as he scrambled to his feet; 'he's the best horse I ever got across—worth twice the money!'

'Faith, he's aisy plased!' remarked a bystander.

'Oh, do go and borrow some dry clothes,' interposed Philippa, practically; 'surely there must be someone——'

BERNARD, HANGING ON TO HIS TAIL, BELABOURED HIM WITH A CANE

'There's a shop in the town where he can strip a peg for 13*s.* 9*d.*,' said Flurry grimly; 'I wouldn't care myself about the clothes you'd borrow here!'

The morning sun shone jovially upon Moonlighter and his rider, caking momently the black bog stuff with which both were coated, and as the group disintegrated, and we turned to go back, every man present was pleasurably aware that the buttons of Mr. Shute's riding breeches had burst at the knee, causing a large triangular hiatus above his gaiter.

'Well,' said Flurry conclusively to me as we retraced our steps, 'I always thought the fellow was a fool, but I never thought he was such a damned fool.'

It seemed an interminable time since breakfast when our party, somewhat shattered by the stirring events of the morning,

found itself gathered in an upstairs room at the Royal Hotel, waiting for a meal that had been ordained some two hours before. The air was charged with the mingled odours of boiling cabbage and frying mutton; we affected to speak of them with disgust, but our souls yearned to them. Female ministrants, with rustling skirts and pounding feet, raced along the passages with trays that were never for us, and opening doors released roaring gusts of conversation, blended with the clatter of knives and forks, and still we starved. Even the ginger-coloured check suit, lately labelled 'The Sandringham. Wonderful value, 16*s.* 9*d.*' in the window of Drumcurran's leading mart, and now displayed upon Mr. Shute's all too lengthy limbs, had lost its power to charm.

'Oh, don't tear that bell quite out by the roots, Bernard,' said his sister, from the heart of a lamentable yawn. 'I dare say it only amuses them when we ring, but it may remind them that we are still alive. Major Yeates, do you or do you not regret the pigs' feet?'

'More than I can express,' I said, turning from the window, where I had been looking down at the endless succession of horses' backs and men's hats, moving in two opposing currents in the street below. 'I dare say if we talk about them for a little we shall feel ill, and that will be better than nothing.'

At this juncture, however, a heavy-laden tray thumped against the door, and our repast was borne into the room by a hot young woman in creaking boots, who hoarsely explained that what kept her was waiting on the potatoes, and that the ould pan that was in it was playing Puck with the beefsteaks.

'Well,' said Miss Shute, as she began to try conclusions between a blunt knife and a bullet-proof mutton chop. 'I have never lived in the country before, but I have always been given to understand that the village inn was one of its chief attractions.' She delicately moved the potato dish so as to cover the traces of a bygone egg, and her glance lingered on the flies that dragged their way across a melting mound of salt butter. 'I like local colour, but I don't care about it on the tablecloth.'

'Well, I'm getting quite anxious about Irish country hotels now,' said Bernard; 'they're getting so civilised and respectable. After all, when you go back to England no one cares a pin to hear that you've been done up to the knocker. That don't amuse them a bit. But all my friends are as pleased as anything when I tell them of the pothouse where I slept in my clothes rather than face the sheets, or how, when I complained to the landlady

next day, she said, "Cock ye up! Wasn't it his Reverence the Dean of Kilcoe had them last!"'

We smiled wanly; what I chiefly felt was respect for any hungry man who could jest in presence of such a meal.

'All this time my hunter hasn't been bought,' said Philippa presently, leaning back in her chair, and abandoning the unequal contest with her beefsteak. 'Who is Bobby Bennett? Will his horse carry a lady?'

Sally Knox looked at me and began to laugh.

'You should ask Major Yeates about Bobby Bennett,' she said.

Confound Miss Sally! It had never seemed worth while to tell Philippa all that story about my doing up Miss Bobby Bennett's hair, and I sank my face in my tumbler of stagnant whisky-and-soda to conceal the colour that suddenly adorned it. Any intelligent man will understand that it was a situation calculated to amuse the ungodly, but without any real fun in it. I explained Miss Bennett as briefly as possible, and at all the more critical points Miss Sally's hazel-green eyes roamed slowly and mercilessly towards me.

'You haven't told Mrs. Yeates that she's one of the greatest horse-copers in the country,' she said, when I had got through somehow; 'she can sell you a very good horse sometimes, and a very bad one too, if she gets the chance.'

'No one will ever explain to me,' said Miss Shute, scanning us all with her dark, half-amused, and wholly sophisticated eyes, 'why horse-coping is more respectable than cheating at cards. I rather respect people who are able to cheat at cards; if everyone did, it would make whist so much more cheerful; but there is no forgiveness for dealing yourself the right card, and there is no condemnation for dealing your neighbour a very wrong horse!'

'Your neighbour is supposed to be able to take care of himself,' said Bernard.

'Well, why doesn't that apply to card-players?' returned his sister; 'are they all in a state of helpless innocence?'

'I'm helplessly innocent,' announced Philippa, 'so I hope Miss Bennett won't deal me a wrong horse.'

'Oh, her mare is one of the right ones,' said Miss Sally; 'she's a lovely jumper, and her manners are the very best.'

The door opened, and Flurry Knox put in his head. 'Bobby Bennett's downstairs,' he said to me mysteriously.

I got up, not without consciousness of Miss Sally's eye, and prepared to follow him. 'You'd better come too, Mrs. Yeates,

to keep an eye on him. Don't let him give her more than thirty, and if he gives that she should return him two sovereigns.' This last injunction was bestowed in a whisper as we descended the stairs.

Miss Bennett was in the crowded yard of the hotel, looking handsome and overdressed, and she greeted me with just that touch of Auld Lang Syne in her manner that I could best have dispensed with. I turned to the business in hand without delay. The brown mare was led forth from the stable and paraded for our benefit; she was one of those inconspicuous, meritorious animals about whom there seems nothing particular to say, and I felt her legs and looked hard at her hocks, and was not much the wiser.

'It's no use my saying she doesn't make a noise,' said Miss Bobby, 'because everyone in the country will tell you she does. You can have a vet. if you like, and that's the only fault he can find with her. But if Mrs. Yeates hasn't hunted before now, I'll guarantee Cruiskeen as just the thing for her. She's really safe and confidential. My little brother Georgie has hunted her—*you* remember Georgie, Major Yeates?—the night of the ball, you know—and he's only eleven. Mr. Knox can tell you what sort she is.'

'Oh, she's a grand mare,' said Mr. Knox, thus appealed to; 'you'd hear her coming three fields off like a German band!'

'And well for you if you could keep within three fields of her!' retorted Miss Bennett. 'At all events, she's not like the hunter you sold Uncle, that used to kick the stars as soon as I put my foot in the stirrup!'

''Twas the size of the foot frightened him,' said Flurry.

'Do you know how Uncle cured him?' said Miss Bennett, turning her back on her adversary; 'he had him tied head and tail across the yard gate, and every man that came in had to get over his back!'

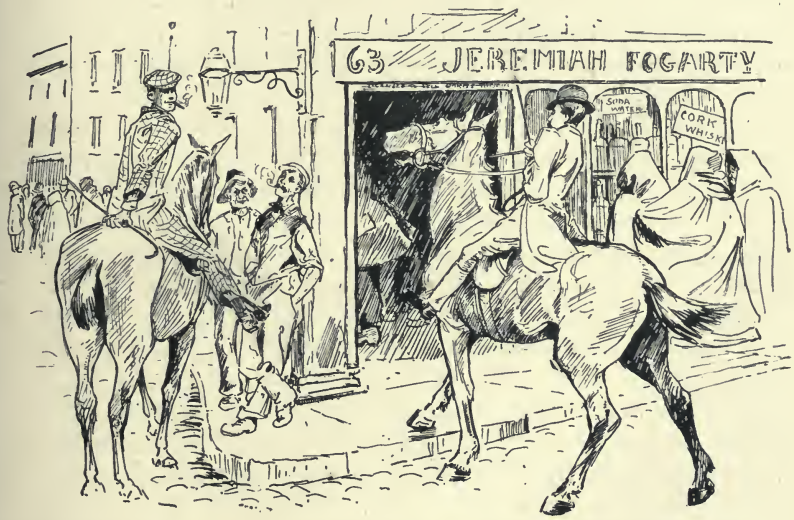
'That's no bad one!' said Flurry.

Philippa looked from one to the other in bewilderment, while the badinage continued, swift and unsmiling, as became two hierarchs of horse-dealing; it went on at intervals for the next ten minutes, and at the end of that time I had bought the mare for thirty pounds. As Miss Bennett said nothing about giving me back two of them, I had not the nerve to suggest it.

After this Flurry and Miss Bennett went away, and were swallowed up in the fair; we returned to our friends upstairs, and began to arrange about getting home. This, among other

difficulties, involved the tracking and capture of the Shutes' groom, and took so long that it necessitated tea. Bernard and I had settled to ride our new purchases home, and the groom was to drive the wagonette—an alteration ardently furthered by Miss Shute. The afternoon was well advanced when Bernard and I struggled through the turmoil of the hotel yard in search of our horses, and, the hotel ostler being nowhere to be found, the Shutes' man saddled our animals for us, and then withdrew, to grapple single-handed with the bays in the calf-house.

'Good business for me, that Knox is sending the grey horse home for me,' remarked Bernard, as his new mare followed him



SHE MOUNTED THE PAVEMENT IN FRONT OF A VERY DISREPUTABLE PUBLIC-HOUSE

tractably out of the stall. 'He'd have been rather a handful in this hole of a place.'

He shoved his way out of the yard in front of me, seemingly quite comfortable and at home upon the descendant of the Mountain Hare, and I followed as closely as drunken carmen and shafts of erratic carts would permit. Cruiskeen evinced a decided tendency to turn to the right on leaving the yard, but she took my leftward tug in good part, and we moved on through the streets of Drumcurran with a dignity that was only impaired by the irrepressible determination of Mr. Shute's new trousers to run up his leg. It was a trifle disappointing that Cruiskeen should carry her nose in the air like a camel, but I set it down to my own bad hands, and to that cause I also imputed her frequent

desire to stop, a desire that appeared to coincide with every fourth or fifth public-house on the line of march. Indeed, at the last corner before we left the town, Miss Bennett's mare and I had a serious difference of opinion, in the course of which she mounted the pavement and remained planted in front of a very disreputable public-house, whose owner had been before me several times for various infringements of the Licensing Acts. Bernard and the corner-boys were of course much pleased; I inwardly resolved to let Miss Bennett know how her groom occupied his time in Drumcurran.

We got out into the calm of the country roads without further incident, and I there discovered that Cruiskeen was possessed of a dromedary swiftness in trotting, that the action was about as comfortable as the dromedary's, and that it was extremely difficult to moderate the pace.

'I say! This is something like going!' said Bernard, cantering hard beside me with slack rein and every appearance of happiness. 'Do you mean to keep it up all the way?'

'You'd better ask this devil,' I replied, hauling on the futile ring snaffle. 'Miss Bennett must have an arm like a prize-fighter. If this is what she calls confidential, I don't want her confidences.'

After another half-mile, during which I cursed Flurry Knox, and registered a vow that Philippa should ride Cruiskeen in a cavalry bit, we reached the cross-roads at which Bernard's way parted from mine. Another difference of opinion between my wife's hunter and me here took place, this time on the subject of parting from our companion, and I experienced that peculiar inward sinking that accompanies the birth of the conviction one has been stuck. There were still some eight miles between me and home, but I had at least the consolation of knowing that the brown mare would easily cover it in forty minutes. But in this also disappointment awaited me. Dropping her head to about the level of her knees, the mare subsided into a walk as slow as that of the slowest cow, and very similar in general style. In this manner I progressed for a further mile, breathing forth, like St. Paul, threatenings and slaughters against Bobby Bennett and all her confederates; and then the idea occurred to me that many really first-class hunters were very poor hacks. I consoled myself with this for a further period, and presently an opportunity for testing it presented itself. The road made a long loop round the flank of a hill, and it was possible to save half a mile or so by getting into the fields. It was a short cut I had often taken on the

Quaker, and it involved nothing more serious than a couple of low stone 'gaps' and an infantine bank. I turned Cruiskeen at the first of these. She was evidently surprised. Being in an excessively bad temper, I beat her in a way that surprised her even more, and she jumped the stone precipitately and with an ease that showed she knew quite well what she was about. I vented some further emotion upon her by the convenient medium of my cane, and galloped her across the field and over the bank, which, as they say in these parts, she 'fled' without putting an iron on it. It was not the right way to jump it, but it was inspiriting, and when she had disposed of the next gap without hesitation my waning confidence in Miss Bennett began to revive. I cantered over the ridge of the hill, and down it towards the cottage near which I was accustomed to get out on to the road again. As I neared my wonted opening in the fence, I saw that it had been filled by a stout pole, well fixed into the bank at each end, but not more than three feet high. Cruiskeen pricked her ears at it with intelligence; I trotted her at it, and gave her a whack.

Ages afterwards there was someone speaking on the edge of a dream that I was dreaming about nothing in particular. I went on dreaming, and was impressed by the shape of a fat jug, mottled white and blue, that intruded itself painfully, and I again heard voices, very urgent and full of effort.

I also made an effort of some kind; I was doing my very best to be good and polite, but I was dreaming in a place that whirred, and was engrossing, and daylight was cold and let in some unknown unpleasantness. For that time the dream got the better of the daylight, and then, *apropos* of nothing, I was standing up in a house with someone's arm round me; the mottled jug was there, so was the unpleasantness, and I was talking with most careful, old-world politeness.

'Sit down now, you're all right,' said Miss Bobby Bennett, who was mopping my face with a handkerchief dipped in the jug.

I perceived that I was asking what had happened.

'She fell over the stick with you,' said Miss Bennett; 'the dirty brute!'

With another great effort I hooked myself on to the march of events, as a truck is taken out of a siding and hooked to a train.

'Oh, the Lord save us!' said a grey-haired woman who held the jug, 'ye're desthroyed entirely, asthore! Oh, glory be to the merciful will of God, me heart lepped across me shesht when I seen him undher the horse!'

'Go out and see if the trap's coming,' said Miss Bennett; 'he should have found the doctor by this.' She stared very closely at my face, and seemed to find it easier to talk in short sentences.

'We must get those cuts looking better before Mrs. Yeates comes.'

After an interval, during which unexpected places in my head ached from the cold water, the desire to be polite and coherent again came upon me.

'I am sure it was not your mare's fault,' I said.

Miss Bennett laughed a very little. I was glad to see her laugh; it had struck me her face was strangely haggard and frightened.

THE GREY-HAIRED WOMAN LAUGHED

'Well, of course, it wasn't poor Cruiskeen's fault,' she said. 'She's nearly home with Mr. Shute by now.'

'Mr. Shute!' I said; 'wasn't he at the fair that day?'

'He was,' answered Miss Bobby, looking at me with very compassionate eyes; 'you and he got on each other's horses by mistake at the hotel, and you got the worst of the exchange!'

'Oh!' I said, without even trying to understand.

'He's here within, your honour's ladyship, Mrs. Yeates, ma'am,' shouted the grey-haired woman at the door; 'don't be unaisy, achudth; he's doing grand. Sure, I'm tellin' Miss Binnitt if she was his wife itself, she couldn't give him betther care!'

The grey-haired woman laughed.

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